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Hip-Pocket AP

At first, most of the news editors he telephoned with the story were downright skeptical. For one thing, few had heard of either 23-year-old David Obst or the somewhat redundantly titled Dispatch News Service he represented. For another, the story he was offering them in his capacity as DNS's general manager added up to a specific indictment of mass murder against a U.S. infantry lieutenant and his troops in Vietnam and would clearly have to be checked thoroughly before it ran.

Accordingly, most of the offers of acceptance were contingent on a subsequent check of Obst's grisly summary of the alleged massacre at Song My. What the editors found was that the DNS reporter who had unearthed the story was Obst's partner, Seymour Hersh, a former Associated Press staffer with a reputation for being zealous and aggressive. Subsequently 36 of the 50 newspapers that Obst telephoned—among them, The Times of London, The San Francisco Chronicle, The Boston Globe, The St. Louis Post-Dispatch—paid \$100 apiece for the story. Thus it was that the fledgling DNS beat everybody to the news that an Army lieutenant named William L. Calley Jr. was suspected of murdering at least 109 Vietnamese civilians.

Overnight, the exclusive transformed the DNS into a sort of hip-pocket



Newsweek—Wally McNamee

Hersh: A zest for detail

AP. With the financial windfall from the Song My story, Obst rented a three-room suite in Washington's National Press Building, and by last week the service boasted four Washington staffers plus part-time correspondents in Japan, Indonesia, England and Vietnam. Most recently it has placed a series of inter-

views with Hanoi leaders by Richard Barnet, a co-director of the anti-establishment Institute for Policy Studies.

The 32-year-old Hersh, a graduate of the University of Chicago, began covering the Pentagon for the AP in September 1966. He quit the service in June of 1967 shortly after the Washington desk took a 10,000-word investigative piece he had written on chemical and biological warfare and cut it back to 1,700 words. Hersh has since used his material for stories for The New Republic and The New York Times Magazine and a book, "Chemical and Biological Warfare: America's Hidden Arsenal."

Politics: Both Hersh and Obst are opponents of the war in Vietnam. Through the New Hampshire primary, Hersh was Eugene McCarthy's press secretary but he quit just before Wisconsin. "It had nothing to do with Gene," Hersh insists. "It was just an insane campaign and it was driving me crazy."

Seven weeks ago Hersh received a telephone call from an informant "with Pentagon connections" whom he declines to name. "It was someone who knew I'd be interested in this kind of story," says Hersh. "He told me that someone was going to be tried at Fort Benning for murdering 75 people. I was horrified." Hersh asked for money from the Philip Stern Family Fund, which regularly provides funds for investigative reporting. Executive director James Boyd assured him the fund would pick up the tab, whatever it was. First, Hersh went to Fort Benning and spent five hours with Lieutenant Calley. Then, he crisscrossed the country tracking down other members of Calley's company, including former Pvt. Paul David Meadlo, who admitted taking part in the atrocity. But no one would buy his story. "Look turned me down," says Hersh. "And an editor at Life said it was out of the question."

Then Hersh turned to Obst, a former Chinese-studies major at Berkeley and occasional fringe participant in the student movement, who happened to be Hersh's next-door neighbor in Washington's Cleveland Park section. The enterprising Obst had earlier had some success in peddling reports from friends in Vietnam to West Coast papers under the logotype "Dispatch News Service." He quickly convinced Hersh that his future was with DNS.

By last week, in addition to the \$3,600 DNS collected from the 36 newspapers, Hersh and Obst were also richer by the \$10,000 CBS is reported to have paid to have Hersh bring Meadlo to New York for an exclusive television interview with Mike Wallace. Had Hersh met Obst earlier he probably would have done even better. "I had heard about the

photographs of the atrocity," says newsman Hersh, "but I didn't pursue them because I don't think in terms of pictures." The editors of Life thought much differently, however. After some protracted bargaining which produced talk of bids as high as \$150,000, Life paid former combat photographer Ron Haerberle \$20,000 for his films of the grisly scenes at Song My.